

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATES OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
RICHIE LOPEZ : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 2425-165

At its meeting of January 16, 2025, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information from the Cumberland County Office of Education (County Office) and the Strang School regarding Richie Lopez, including documents from the Pineland Learning Center (Pineland). Lopez currently holds an Instructional Substitute credential, expiring January 31, 2027.

On November 20, 2024, Pineland provided the County Office with a copy of a paper certificate that Pineland indicated was provided by Lopez. The paper certificate was for a Teacher of Health and Physical Education Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing and was allegedly issued in May 2022. The certificate contains no tracking number or social security number, and lists the Commissioner of Education as Kevin Dehmer (Dehmer) and the Board Secretary as Rani Singh (Singh). However, the Board ceased issuing paper certificates in 2015. Thus, there were no paper certificates issued in 2022. Moreover, former Acting Commissioner Angelica Allen-McMillan was the acting Commissioner as of May 2022, the alleged date of issuance contained on the paper certificate, not former Commissioner Kevin Dehmer. And the signature of Dehmer appears to be imposed over another signature that is partially visible, and the signature of Singh on the document is not her signature. Further, paper certificates previously issued by the Board historically contained social security numbers and tracking numbers, both of which are absent on the paper certificate that Lopez provided to Pineland.

The Office of Recruitment, Preparation and Certification (RPC) provided information to the Board that Lopez had applied for a Teacher of Health and Physical Education Certificate of Eligibility on March 15, 2024, and that his application expired on September 11, 2024, due to Lopez' lack of submitting the required documents for his application to proceed to the review stage.

Further, on December 5, 2024, the Strang School emailed the Board to say that they had hired Lopez and that when they went into NJEdCert to register him for a provisional, they received a message that the educator was restricted and to contact the Board. Strang's email attached a copy of the paper certificate Lopez had submitted to them, which was the same copy previously submitted to Pineland.

Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of February 28, 2025, to issue Lopez an Order to Show Cause as to why the certificates he holds should not be revoked.

On March 3, 2025, the Board sent Lopez the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested. The Order provided that Lopez had 30 days to respond pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B- 4.6(b)*. The certified mail copy was marked "Delivered, Left with Individual" and returned unsigned, and the regular mail copy was not returned. Lopez did not file a response.

On August 27, 2025, the Board sent Lopez a second notice by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, providing him with an additional fifteen (15) days to respond to the Order to Show Cause pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. The certified mail copy was marked "Delivered, Left with Individual" and the regular mail copy was not returned. Again, Lopez did not file a response.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, the Board sent Lopez a hearing notice by regular and certified mail, return receipt requested, on December 10, 2025. The notice explained

that because no answer was filed there appeared to be no dispute as to material facts in this matter. Thus, Lopez was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause constituted conduct unbecoming a certificate holder, as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board found just cause to take action against his certificates. Lopez was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue. The certified mail copy was marked “Unclaimed[,]” and the regular mail copy was not returned. Lopez did not file a response or request to appear before the Board.

The Board has the authority to “issue appropriate certificates to teach or to administer” and “may revoke the same under rules and regulations prescribed by the State board.” *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38; *see also N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-3.2 and -4.4; *Morison v. Willingboro Bd. of Educ.*, 478 N.J. Super. 229 (App. Div. 2024), *cert. denied* 258 N.J. 143 (July 11, 2024). The Board may take action against a certificate holder on the basis of “demonstrated inefficiency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher, or other just cause.” *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.4; *see also Morison*, 478 N.J. Super. at 246, 248 (explaining the Board is responsible for protecting schoolchildren from improper teacher conduct and may suspend or revoke an educator’s continued ability to serve as a teacher at any public school based on unbecoming conduct).

Because Lopez failed to respond to the Order to Show Cause, the allegations are deemed admitted. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(c). Consequently, at its meeting of January 22, 2026, the Board considered only the allegations in the February 28, 2025 Order to Show Cause and the information received from the County Office and the Strang School. Because the allegations were deemed admitted, the Board concluded that no material facts related to Lopez’s offenses were in dispute. And because no material facts related to Lopez’s conduct were in dispute, the Board determined

that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(h).

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Lopez's actions here constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Based on the undisputed facts in this matter, the Board finds that Lopez engaged in conduct unbecoming of an educator. Unbecoming conduct is defined as "conduct 'which adversely affects the morale or efficiency of the [department]' or 'has a tendency to destroy public respect for [government] employees and confidence in the operation of [public] services.'" *Bound Brook Bd. of Educ. v. Ciripompa*, 228 *N.J.* 4, 13 (2017) (quoting *In re Young*, 202 *N.J.* 50, 66 (2010) (citing *Karins v. Atl. City*, 152 *N.J.* 532, 554 (1998))). "[A] finding of unbecoming conduct 'need not be predicated upon the violation of any particular rule or regulation, but may be based merely upon the violation of the implicit standard of good behavior which devolves upon one who stands in the public eye as an upholder of that which is morally and legal correct.'" *Id.* at 13-14 (quoting *Karins*, 152 *N.J.* at 555). "It focuses on the morale, efficiency, and public perception of an entity, and how those concerns are harmed by allowing teachers to behave inappropriately while holding public employment." *Id.* at 14. "The touchstone of the determination lies in the certificate holder's 'fitness to discharge the duties and functions of one's office or position.'" *Young*, 202 *N.J.* at 66 (quoting *In re Grossman*, 127 *N.J.* Super. 13, 29 (App. Div. 1974)).

Here, the Board finds that Lopez' two submissions of an inauthentic, fabricated document for employment purposes to two separate New Jersey schools is unambiguous evidence of conduct unbecoming. Holding oneself out as a legitimate holder of an educator certificate that they in fact do not hold clearly demonstrates a violation of the implicit standard of good behavior expected of public-school teachers. Thus, the Board finds that Lopez engaged in conduct unbecoming an educator and provides the basis for the Board's finding.

Having found that Lopez engaged in unbecoming conduct, the Board must now determine the appropriate penalty to be applied. In doing so, the Board considers the “nature and gravity of the offenses under all the circumstances involved, any evidence as to provocation, extenuation or aggravation,” and any “harm or injurious effect” on the maintenance of discipline and the proper administration of the school system. *In re Fulcomer*, 93 N.J. Super. 404, 422 (App. Div. 1967). Central to this evaluation is the understanding that “[t]eachers... are professional employees to whom the people have entrusted the care and custody of ... school children. This heavy duty requires a degree of self-restraint and controlled behavior rarely requisite to other types of employment.” *Tenure of Sammons*, 1972 S.L.D. 302, 321. Fitness to teach depends on a broad range of factors, including the teacher’s impact and effect upon the students, because a “teacher works in a sensitive area in a schoolroom” and “shapes the attitude of young minds toward the society in which they live.” *Grossman*, 127 N.J. at 30 (*quoting Adler v. Bd. of Educ. of City of New York*, 342 U.S. 485 (1952)). Importantly, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident if sufficiently flagrant. *Fulcomer*, 93 N.J. Super. at 421; *Redcay v. State Bd. of Educ.*, 130 N.J.L. 369, 371 (1943), *aff’d*, 131 N.J.L. 326 (E & A 1944).

In this instance, the Board concludes that the appropriate response to Lopez’s breach in conduct of an educator is revocation of his certificates. Lopez’s conduct of dishonesty in submitting an inauthentic educator certificate to be used for employing him as a properly certified teacher sets a poor example for students under his charge and demonstrates he is unfit to discharge the duties and functions as a public-school teacher. His conduct of submitting the inauthentic educator certificate to two separate New Jersey schools negates his position as a role model and undermines the notion of trust that is an essential quality necessary to teach children and demonstrates strong evidence that revocation is appropriate. Allowing him to maintain

certification to teach in a public school would have a negative impact on the proper administration of the school system. Thus, revocation of his certificates is the appropriate response in this matter.

Accordingly, on January 22, 2026, the Board voted to revoke Richie Lopez's Instructional Substitute credential. On this 6th day of March 2026, the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision, and it is therefore ORDERED that Lopez's certificates are REVOKED, effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Lopez return his paper certificates, if issued, to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.



Rani Singh, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

Date of Mailing:
By Certified and Regular mail

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.